

Making Sense of the Imperial Pivot: *Metaphor Theory and the Thought of King Jeongjo*

Christopher LOVINS

Abstract

Jeongjo was the last strong king of the Joseon period and the most successful of the latter half of the dynasty. Jeongjo used his extensive Confucian education to propagate a royalist political philosophy through which to combat the minister-centered thought of the aristocracy. After a brief discussion of royal power in Joseon vis-à-vis contemporary China and tracing the history of the “imperial pivot” (hwanggeuk) concept, this paper draws on conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory to examine how King Jeongjo argued for royal power in his preface to the Hwanggeukpyeon (Book of the Imperial Pivot). It explores four primary metaphors embedded in the complex metaphor of the king as the “imperial pivot” and then looks at the metaphor as a double-scope blend that creates a new space from the source domains of central pivot and king in politics. It argues that Jeongjo draws upon four primary metaphors—particularly that of balance—in order to provoke a visceral desire in his ministers for him to use the power of the throne to eliminate divisive factions. The imperial pivot is a blended space that allows Jeongjo to invoke the visceral desire for equilibrium provided by the pivot metaphor while leaving behind its connotation of passivity.

Keywords: Jeongjo, *tangpyeong*, Neo-Confucianism, *hwanggeuk*, metaphor theory, blending theory

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Introduction

Alas! This book is a discussion of factional strife. Why is it named *imperial pivot*? Only the imperial pivot can eradicate this discourse—that is the reason for the name.¹

Jeongjo (r. 1776-1800) was the last strong king of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) and the most successful of the latter half of the dynasty.² He brought an end to two centuries of bitter factional struggles that had continuously set off bloody purges in the ranks of the ruling *yangban* elite. He strengthened the throne through the creation of new institutions such as the Royal Library (Gyujanggak 奎章閣), whose entire first floor was devoted to his own writings. As the eventual heir to the throne from his birth, the future king received intense instruction in the state Neo-Confucian ideology from *yangban* tutors. In addition to enhancing the royal power through structural innovation, Jeongjo enlisted his extensive Confucian education to propagate a royalist political philosophy to combat the minister-centered thought of the aristocracy (Han 2011, 138). Through the Royal Lecture, personal instruction of selected young officials, and extensive public writing, Jeongjo wrested control of the sage-king concept away from his ministers and formulated it in such a way that put himself firmly in control.

This paper draws on conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory to examine how King Jeongjo used the “imperial pivot” (*hwanggeuk* 皇極; Ch. *huangji*) in pursuit of royal power in his preface to the *Hwanggeukpyeon* 皇極編 (Book of the Imperial Pivot). After a brief discussion of royal power in late Joseon as compared to Qing China, it provides a bird’s-eye view of the history of the imperial pivot concept

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1. “噫. 此編即朋黨分爭之說也. 奚以名皇極也. 惟皇極. 可以破此說故名也.” Except where noted, all Classical Chinese quotations in the main text of this article are from the preface to the *Hwanggeukpyeon* (Book of the Imperial Pivot). This preface is also included in the *Hongjae jeonso* (Collected Works of King Jeongjo). All translations from Classical Chinese are mine unless otherwise noted.
 2. Haboush calls Jeongjo’s reign “a glorious chapter in the Yi Confucian monarchy, deserving of the epithet ‘restoration’ . . .” (Haboush 1998, 233).

from its appearance in the *Shujing* 書經 (Book of Documents) to the writings of late Joseon philosophers. It then examines how Jeongjo used the concept in his preface to the *Hwanggeukpyeon*. It explores four primary metaphors that are activated by the complex metaphor of the king as the “imperial pivot.” Finally, it introduces blending theory and explores the imperial pivot as a double-scope blend that generates normative force for Jeongjo’s conception of kingship.

Political Power and Neo-Confucianism in Late Joseon Period

After swinging to the extremity of being regarded merely as a rhetorical cloak for real power struggles, Neo-Confucianism has returned to prominence in the study of Joseon politics, with scholars noting that ideology and political reality intertwined to form a complex relationship (Deuchler 1999; Jung 1992; Keum 2000; K. Lee 2011; Lovins 2006). Joseon’s ruling ideology of Neo-Confucianism, as an instrument of royal power, was a two-edged sword (Han 2011, 143-146).

As James Palais had demonstrated, contradictory tendencies of this belief system contributed to a balance of royal/bureaucratic and aristocratic forces in Korea. For the monarch, Neo-Confucianism is powerful because it is predicated on there being a king. The educated elites ostensibly serve him, offering advice while he does the actual ruling. Through emphasis on the Confucian virtue of *chung* 忠 (Ch. *zhong*; meaning “loyalty”), he dispatches his officials to carry out his instructions, and the Confucian bureaucracy gives him sole right of appointment to high office. For the *yangban*, the Neo-Confucian virtue of *hyo* 孝 (Ch. *xiao*; meaning “filial piety”) represents a source of loyalty outside the state. The emphasis on bureaucracy and the right to remonstrate restricts the ruler’s ability to curtail *yangban* privilege, and the notion of a ruling class made up of virtuous men can justify inequalities of status and wealth from which the *yangban* class draws its strength.

Further, the Korean king in the Neo-Confucian worldview was subservient to the Son of Heaven, the emperor of China. That is, the

Korean monarch was not the final arbiter in his country, for the Chinese emperor always remained as the true master of All-under-Heaven. Though in practice the emperor did not intervene in domestic Joseon affairs—even to the point of not intervening in succession struggles—it certainly weakened the ideological basis for absolute monarchy in Joseon (Palais 1975).

At the time of Jeongjo's accession, the Korean *yangban* ruling class was divided into the four major factions (known as *sasaek* 四色; literally “four colors”) and numerous marginal ones. Factionalism had been rife at the Korean court since 1575 and had long been recognized as a problem. The monarch naturally disapproved of factions since they constituted a loyalty to someone, the factional leader, other than the king, and the factions' endless vitriolic denunciations of each other distracted the central government from the business the sovereign wanted to get done. The Neo-Confucian scholars who dominated the court were also unhappy with factionalism, since it was they who were in danger of execution or political death in the form of exile to remote areas when their faction lost power.

Fortunately, for both king and ministers, Neo-Confucian philosophy did not approve of factions. The government's civil service examination was supposed to select only virtuous men for government service, and the virtuous men, through proper and upright debate, were supposed to discover the correct course of action to take in a given situation. The destructive and violent factional feuding of late Joseon was a far cry from the harmonious government Neo-Confucianism demanded.

However, even if both king and minister agreed that factionalism was bad and should be eliminated and that it was the monarch's responsibility to do this, they differed widely on how it should be done. The *yangban* attributed factionalism to the banding together of “petty men” (*soin* 小人; Ch. *xiaoren*), whose devious concern with their own private interests forced the true gentlemen (*gunja* 君子; Ch. *junzi*) to form their own faction in order to oppose the factions of the petty men (Haboush 1998, 121). The solution to factionalism was thus, in their view, to put the gentlemen's faction in power and allow

it to purge the other factions. Harmony would in this way be restored. Having put the right men in charge, the king was free to retire to his chambers and perfect his moral virtue, leaving the messy business of running the country to the gentlemen now in power. Unlike Chinese emperors, Korean kings were never able to use eunuchs to offset the power of the scholar-official class. Jeongjo would thus have had little choice but to work with the factions of this class in his attempts to implement reform (S. Lee 2000, 203).

Jeongjo's great-grandfather Sukjong (r. 1661–1720) attempted to do exactly this—at least the first part—playing the factions off against each other by alternately putting one faction in power and then purging it in favor of a rival faction (S. Lee 2000, 142). Jeongjo's grandfather and predecessor Yeongjo (r. 1724–1776) strove to avoid the bloody purges associated with this policy and tried to contain factionalism through his Policy of Impartiality (Tangpyeongchaek 蕩平策). This policy was essentially Yeongjo's refusing to give one faction the right to take vengeance upon another (Palais 1975, 47), alternately supporting and opposing each faction, and avoiding the appearance of favoritism by rewarding or punishing commensurate members of each faction (B. Kim 2010, 156-157; S. Lee 2000, 143, 169).

Yeongjo's Policy of Impartiality was only partly effective, and it required suppression of the censorial voice—Joseon's equivalent of “free speech” in order to achieve even that partial success (Haboush 1998, 152-153). It is here that Jeongjo brought to bear his formidable command of the Confucian Classics in pursuit of his goal to strengthen the throne at the expense of the bureaucracy. Jeongjo finally brought factionalism under control through active ruling and constant exhortation of royal supremacy in unmistakably Confucian terms rather than by placing one faction in power and leaving it to rule. His preface to the *Hwanggeukpyeon* was one salvo in Jeongjo's struggle with his ministers over the king's role in the political world.

The Development of *Hwanggeuk*

China

The phrase *huangji* (Kor. *hwanggeuk*) or “imperial pivot”, which can be interchangeably translated as “royal ultimate,” is first discussed in the *Shujing*. There it forms the central concern of the Great Plan (*hongbeom* 洪範; Ch. *hongfan*), Gija 箕子 (Ch. Jizi)’s instructions in nine articles for how to run a state. Given that some believed that Gija left China to found the earliest Korean kingdom, the Joseon elite took great interest in the “Great Plan” purportedly written by him, none more so than King Jeongjo himself. Michael Nylan examines the Great Plan at some length in her 1992 *The Shifting Centre: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings*. According to Nylan (1992, 14), section five of the plan—the one concerning the imperial pivot—“depicts the ruler’s impartial actions as the foundation for maximum power and authority.” In essence, the Great Plan and section five in particular calls for the ruler to “take an active political role in developing his own power” and to maintain flexibility in his use of power (Nylan 1992, 32), even to the point of taking into government service men of less than perfect virtue. As the author of the Great Plan writes, “those who do not come up to the highest point of excellence, and yet do not involve themselves in crime—let the sovereign receive.”³

Nylan traces the development in the interpretations of this short portion of the documents. While the Shang period had the entire royal clan viewed as the center of the cosmos, the Han period saw the emperor alone occupy this position (Nylan 1992, 9). Likewise, Wang Aihe (2000, 215) argues that, during the Han dynasty, the emperor was “the pivot of power through which diverse compositions of power contested and constrained one another.” Four factors meant that the emperor’s “pivotal position depended on a balance of competing forces” (Wang 2000, 201). First, the imperial family inherited its

3. The translation is Legge's (1865).

privileges, including the throne itself, while the state was founded on the requirement of virtuous merit for service in government. Second, the importance of the military to defend the Empire was in constant tension with Confucian notions of civilian rule. Third, princes of the imperial blood vied with male relatives of imperial consorts for influence in the government. Finally, the ideal of centralized government was sorely tested by the difficulties in keeping control over local administrators.

With the exception of the second, any scholar of Joseon will recognize these factors operating in that country as well. Wang notes that, although Han emperors executed 13 subordinate kings of the imperial line, they also executed three of the scholar-statesmen who warned them of the kings' disloyalty, illustrating the tension of Wang's "competing" forces anchored by the emperor in the center (Wang 2000, 201). Under Jeongjo's interpretation of the king's role, he was likewise to serve as the pivot that balanced competing forces, as we shall see.

By the Song dynasty, commentators generally agreed that *huangji* referred not to the impartiality of the ruler but to the gentleman's centering of himself. No longer did the ruler mediate between Heaven and Earth; instead, the gentry class mediated between the ruler and the people. While the ruler engaged in nonaction, the ministers drawn from the gentry were to rule. This view stripped the imperial pivot of all political implications, and it was consequently de-emphasized by Song dynasty commentators (Nylan 1992, 68).

The Song period saw the inversion of the "original" Great Plan, as reconstructed by Nylan (1992), and this was evidenced by Zhu Xi's treatment of it. Han dynasty commentators such as Kong Anguo had generally glossed *huang* as *da* 大 (meaning "great") and *ji* as *zhong* 中 (meaning "center") (Nylan 1992, 48). Zhu Xi took Kong to task for this gloss, arguing instead that *huang* referred to the ruler and *ji* to the impartial ethical standards he was expected to uphold (Jo 2007, 153; Nylan 1998, 98). In Zhu's view, impartiality was no longer located within the ruler but outside of him, in these objective ethical standards. Rather than bringing order to the cosmos itself, the ruler mere-

ly ensured that these external standards are obeyed. For commentators in Zhu Xi's tradition, *huangji* became just another virtue word that had been "stripped of its activist content" (Nylan 1992, 98). One Song dynasty commentator did not accept this view and hearkened back to the "original" Great Plan's exhortations to the ruler to remain flexible and adaptable, and he argued that the Great Plan applied to the ruler alone, not to the ministers or the gentry. However, because his name was Wang Anshi, his view was not widely adopted by later commentators (Nylan 1992, 91-98).

Joseon

It is perhaps no surprise that Joseon commentators generally followed Zhu Xi's understanding of the imperial pivot. In addition to the considerable weight Zhu's voice carried among the Joseon elite, it provided justification for the *yangban* aristocracy's occupation of the leading role in government vis-à-vis the throne, particularly in the case of the Old Doctrine (Noron 老論) faction, King Jeongjo's primary opponents, who were quick to cite Zhu Xi in support of their view of royal submission to ministerial guidance (Jo 2006, 203). Even commentators like Yun Hyu (1617-1680), an early critic of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism who was not shy about criticizing Zhu Xi, praised Zhu's "correction" of the Han dynasty gloss of *hwanggeuk* (Kim Man-il 2007, 65-66).

It took a little more radical scholar to modify Zhu Xi's view, and this was Bak Se-chae (1631-1695). Bak attempted to combine the older "flexible and adaptable" reading of the Great Plan with Zhu Xi's reading, citing the work of Kong Anguo. Following Zhu Xi, Bak accepted that the *hwanggeuk* required the king to govern the state through moral cultivation, but he departed from Zhu when he emphasized the importance of flexibility in the king's application of power in order to eliminate immoral factionalism, a Korean reality that Zhu Xi had not had to face (Kim Man-il 2007, 119; Y. Kim 2008, 236-237; Woo 1994, 107).

Jeong Je-du (1649-1736) also generally followed Zhu Xi, retaining

geuk as a universal moral standard rather than the flexible application of power, but he did define the core of *hwanggeuk* as *tangpyeong*, the balancing of competing forces, and did not support the king's sole leadership (Jo 2006, 200-201). Silhak 實學 scholars such as Yi Ik (1681-1763) and Bak Se-dang (1629-1703) argued for going beyond the Song understanding of the *Shujing*, citing Han commentators like Kong Anguo and Kong Yingda. Yi Ik even attempted an analysis in line with the principles of the School of Evidential Learning (*gojeunghak* 考證學; Ch. *kaozhengxue*) (Kim Man-il 2007, 163-164). Thus, by the time Jeongjo came onto the scene, the Song understanding of the imperial pivot, though generally accepted, had not gone unchallenged by Joseon scholars.

How did Jeongjo's predecessor Yeongjo regard the imperial pivot? Although Jeongjo's Policy of Impartiality was built on that of Yeongjo, there were important differences between the two (Baek 2010), including their use of the metaphor of imperial pivot. Yeongjo connected the imperial *pivot* to the *pivot of the people* (*mingeuk* 民極; Ch. *minji*) as part of his effort to identify the king with the common people. For him, *geuk* remains firmly as Zhu Xi defined it, the standard that the ruler upholds (B. Kim 2010, 258-265), and the king does not himself establish it but inherits it from his predecessors:

Zhang Zai wrote, "All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions." There is no escaping this as the way to govern a state.⁴

All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.⁵

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4. "張橫渠云: '民吾同胞, 物吾與也。' 爲國之道, 要不出此" (*Yeongjo sillok*, 26th day of 9th lunar month, 1st year of King Yeongjo's reign [1725]). Yeongjo is quoting Zhang Zai's *Ximing* 西銘 (Western Inscription), and I use here the standard translation from *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, edited by de Bary, Chan, and Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964).
 5. "且民吾同胞, 物吾與也" (*Yeongjo sillok*, 3rd day of the 7th lunar month, 26th year of King Yeongjo's reign [1750]). This time, Yeongjo does not specifically attribute it to Zhang Zai, but the quotation is the same.

Your Majesty's responsibility is truly to set up the *pivot of the people* for all time.⁶

It is not I who establishes the imperial pivot, but the royal line.⁷

As for Your Majesty's great work of establishing the imperial pivot, does it not lie merely in appointing talented men to office?⁸

Jeongjo, by contrast, attempted during his reign to mark the king off by lumping *scholar-officials* in with the common people (Baek 2010, 425-439; You 2009, 44). Thus, Jeongjo hardly mentions the *pivot of the people* at all, and almost never in conjunction with the imperial pivot. In fact, the term *mingeuk* appears 34 times in the *Seungjeongwon ilgi* (Diary of the Royal Secretariat) for Yeongjo (approximately every 18 months), compared to only five times in the *Ilgi* for Jeongjo (approximately every five years), and it appears only once in Jeongjo's *Hongjae jeonso* (Collected Works of King Jeongjo), where it is not connected to *hwanggeuk*. Further, as we shall see, Jeongjo says it is the king (meaning himself) who establishes the imperial pivot; it is no standard for the ruler merely to uphold.

The Imperial Pivot as a Conceptual Metaphor

King Jeongjo was faced with a difficult dilemma. As the successor to the longest-reigning king of the dynasty, he was expected to continue Yeongjo's policies, but the Policy of Impartiality was not popular at court, especially among the dominant Old Doctrine faction, and had

6. “殿下處分，實爲萬世立民極。” The quotation is from the *Seungjeongwon ilgi* (Diary of the Royal Secretariat), 28th day of the 3rd lunar month, 5th year of King Yeongjo's reign (1729).

7. “非我建極，卽我列朝皇極也” (*Yeongjo sillok*, 17th day of the 5th lunar month, 40th year of King Yeongjo's reign [1764]).

8. “然則殿下之大建皇極，惟才是用之意，果安在哉?” (*Yeongjo sillok*, 19th day of the 12th lunar month, 9th year of King Yeongjo's reign [1733]). This quotation is taken from a memorial submitted by Kim Sang-seong.

achieved only partial success at best. Jeongjo was thus forced to alter the policy without making overt changes. His solution was to “clarify” its meaning through explication of the imperial pivot concept according to his own interpretation, refuting the standard Neo-Confucian scholars’ discourse of both *hwanggeuk* as the standard of self-cultivation and the king as passive implementer of their policies (Baek 2010; Han 2011, 144; B. Kim 2010, 137-138).

Jeongjo was fond of the *Shujing* and the Great Plan in particular, often requiring that answers to “policy questions” (*chaengmun* 策問; Ch. *cewen*) be grounded in the imperial pivot portion of the Great Plan.⁹ When he ordered the compilation of the *Ogyeong baekpyeon* 五經百篇 (One Hundred Chapters from the Five Classics) to increase scholars’ knowledge of the Five Classics—and to depart from the adherence to Zhu Xi’s Four Books—the Great Plan was one of the included chapters (Kim Moon-sik 2000, 120, table 7). Jeongjo lamented that the Five Classics, when they were studied at all, were merely memorized rather than understood and put into practice in officials’ lives, and so he made the *Ogyeong baekpyeon* required reading for all scholars in the Royal Library (Kim Moon-sik 2000, 111). Such compilations sought to restore the text of each classic to its original, pre-Han state, and the king encouraged both direct readings of the text without reliance on commentaries (Kim Moon-sik 2000, 18-20; 2007, 252), and use of older interpretations than Zhu Xi-approved Song-era commentaries (Baek 2010).

The king also appreciated those officials willing to depart from Zhu Xi’s interpretations, often of the Southerners (Namin 南人) faction, which generally favored a stronger monarchy. One of the Southerners’ officials, who was frequently in Jeongjo’s favor was Dasan Jeong Yak-yong, also a man not shy about openly disagreeing with Zhu Xi. In his *Jungyong ganguibo* 中庸講義補 (Supplemented Lectures on the *Doctrine*

9. Park provides one such question as an example, recorded on the 13th day of the 10th lunar month of Jeongjo’s 1st year of reign (1776): “以洪範皇極內篇，策試趙憲喆” (“Jo Heon-cheol is to write using the Imperial Pivot section of the Great Plan.”) (Park 2001, 99).

of the Mean), he writes, “Zhu Xi’s doctrine of human nature (*seong* 性; Ch. *xing*) and the Way consistently conflates human beings with animals. Therefore, much of what he says on this subject is an obstruction that is difficult to fathom.”¹⁰ Dasan then discusses how Zhu Xi has erred in claiming that all one needs to do to cultivate the self is to act naturally, according to human nature:

From this we can see that what [Zhu Xi] means by “following one’s nature” is nothing more than acting naturally. I fear this is not in harmony with the practice of the sages of old, which was “restraining yourself and returning to the rites” [*Analects* 12:1]. It sounds, rather, like the mad teachings of Daoists like Zhuangzi, which are totally unreliable.¹¹

Later, we will see how Dasan took up Jeongjo’s reformulation of the imperial pivot concept and brought his own considerable scholarly ability to assist the king in refining it.

So how did Jeongjo make use of the imperial pivot? Conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory can provide an answer. More and more empirical evidence is coming to light, which suggests that even the most abstract concepts are grounded in human sensorimotor experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 14; Slingerland 2008, 60). According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, “[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5). By mapping our understanding of one conceptual metaphor onto another, we reason with metaphors in order to manipulate them (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 65-67), eventually reaching into a physical, body-based metaphor that can be shared and understood by human beings with vastly different backgrounds.

Jeongjo’s imperial pivot is a complex metaphor that invokes at least four sensory image schemas. First, it invokes the primary metaphor, “organization is physical structure.”

10. “朱子於性道之說，每兼言人物，故其窒難難通，多此類也。”

11. “由是觀之，所謂率性，不過其自然，恐與古聖人克己復禮之學，不相符合，聞之似覺混洋，學之無可依據。”

The Late King [Yeongjo] was grieved at this [factional strife] and established the existence of the pivot and so caused the four corners to return to it and come together.¹²

Here Jeongjo argues for the throne—the pivot—as the means by which the factions can be united. In addition to referring to the four directions surrounding the center (and hence focal point), the phrase “four corners” (*sabang* 四方; Ch. *sifang*) may also be a clever reference to the “Four Colors” mentioned above. Compare with the following selection, spoken by the king as part of a “policy question” relating to the *Hwanggeuk naepyeon* 皇極內篇 (Essence of the Imperial Pivot):

The logic and wisdom of this book must first be read and taught in every home. If one studies them diligently, the particulars and origins of the writings of Yu 禹 and of the Great Plan of Gija [Jizi] will light the darkness like brilliant candles. It is not until then that the politics of protecting and granting the imperial pivot is implemented and, in turn, the people can be brought to the realm of peace and tranquility.¹³

Returning to Jeongjo’s preface to the *Hwanggeukpyeon*:

All peacefully know their place; this is the Way of the imperial pivot. How could there be factions?¹⁴

Here, Jeongjo’s plan involves each minister knowing his proper role and carrying it out. The minister’s role (*wi* 禹; Ch. *wei*; literally “place”) in relation to the king is equated with physical location in relation to the pivot.

This leads into the second primary metaphor, “intimacy is close-

12. “先大王憂之. 建其有極. 而使四方歸會焉.”

13. “則此篇之理數頭腦. 必先使之家講戶讀. 精鑽力索. 禹書箕範之經緯淵源. 燦然若昏衢之秉明燭. 然後方可以做保極錫極之治. 而躋斯民於蕩蕩平平之域.” This quotation is from the *Hwanggeuk naepyeon*, also found in Jeongjo’s *Hongjae jeonseo*.

14. “靖共厥位. 斯即皇極之道. 黨於何有.”

ness.” Because the pivot must cause the four corners—the factions—to return to it, Jeongjo is reminding his feuding ministers of how far the idea of factionalism is from proper Confucian government. Both in their distance from each other and from the king, factions are not intimate with the king. In order for the state to be ordered, the king and his ministers must have the closest of working relationships. This, Jeongjo argues, requires the ministers to *return* to the pivot, i.e., to the service of him rather than to that of any factional leader.

Third, the notion of a pivot invokes the *center-periphery* schema.¹⁵ Jeongjo activates the fundamental human experience that “[o]ur world radiates out from *our bodies* as perceptual centers” (Johnson 1987, 124) to argue that political power radiates out from the king in the center. Harmony around the center is what everyone should strive for, Jeongjo writes.

Following the plan of the Late King so that there will be harmony around the throne is certainly my responsibility, and how could it not also be that of court officials, who ought to be cautious and attentive?¹⁶

Naturally, the king wants harmony in his immediate vicinity (also drawing once more on the metaphor, “intimacy is closeness,” but Jeongjo argues that his officials should also be concerned with harmony at the center. Near the end of the text, Jeongjo calls for another ordering around the center, this time directly invoking impartiality (*pyeong* 平; Ch. *ping*).

If we can order the heart according to impartiality and investigate *li* according to public good, then when there is fault in us, we can repent of it, and when there is transgression in others, we can forgive them. We can all teach each other and instruct one another.

15. Johnson (1987) points out that the *center-periphery* schema itself involves several other schemas “superimposed” on it. For brevity’s sake, I will not explore these schemas-within-schemas.

16. “遵先王謨烈，協和有位，固予小子責也，而亦豈非廷臣所宜兢兢者歟。”

All peacefully know their place; this is the Way of the imperial pivot.¹⁷

It is, of course, the king who knows what is impartial, since he is in the center and thus the only one not prejudiced in a given direction. In Jeongjo's view, ordering the heart according to impartiality means to center oneself on the king and thereby avoid divisive recriminations for perceived slights against one's cherished perspective. Centrality was a common theme for the king. In a conversation with Sim Hwan-ji, perhaps Jeongjo's most long-lasting and intransigent major opponent, the king compares himself (imperial pivot) to the central pillar that holds up the roof of a house (analogous to a keystone) and to the Pole (i.e., North) Star around which the universe turns:

Does the *Shujing* not say that only the king can establish the pivot? Establishing the pivot lies in the king and conforming to the pivot lies in his subjects. The pivot is designated just as the central pillar and the Pole Star are. Once the central pillar of the house is established, then the hinges and posts of the gate, the bars and posts of the door will be in their places. When the Pole Star is set in its place, then the constellations will be set around it. The establishment of the imperial pivot is just so.¹⁸

Dasan supported the king's view of the imperial pivot. In his commentary on the *Shujing*, he writes:

The Pole Star is the Pivot of Heaven. It is in the center of Heaven, and therefore it is named the North Pivot. This is the same reason that the central pillar of a house is so named the house pivot. . . . The imperial pivot is the center of the Nine Divisions of the Great

17. “苟能平以秉心、公以察理、罪在己則訟之、過在人則恕之、胥訓告教誨、靖共厥位、斯即皇極之道。”

18. “書不云乎、惟皇作極、建極在上、協極在下、極者、即屋極北極之謂也。屋極一建、而椳梲扂楔、各得其所、北極居其所、而列宿環拱、皇極之建、亦猶是也” (*Jeongjo sillok*, 16th day of the 6th lunar month, 24th year of King Jeongjo's reign [1800]). The four virtues are sincerity, benevolence, filial piety, and propriety.

Plan. It is like the plot at the center of the nine plots of the equal-field system and serves as the point around which the four corners of the world and the four virtues turn. Therefore, it is said [in the *Shujing*] “[the ruler] establishes the existence of the pivot and concentrates in himself the five blessings.”¹⁹

Dasan goes on to explain why the king is the source of the five blessings and explicitly links the imperial pivot to King Yu. He finishes up his discussion of *hwanggeuk* in this way:

By these means, the king perfects [literally, “pivotizes”] the people. Rectification is the king establishing the pivot. The interchange of the Supreme Polarity [*taegeuk* 太極; Ch. *taiji*] is the *yin* and *yang*, the four forms that *yin* and *yang* manifest in nature, the 64 diagrams, and the 384 trigrams. In this way, the imperial pivot concentrates in him the five blessings in order to bestow them on the myriad peoples.²⁰

Fourth, Jeongjo uses the imperial pivot to continue and expand the Policy of Impartiality—his grandfather’s attempt to eliminate factionalism through balancing reward and punishments among the two most powerful factions—by invoking the *balance* schema. For Jeongjo, the king as the pivot is the only one who can eliminate factionalism because he is the only one in the impartial position, who can “get the feel” for how to keep the state in balance. Also, as balance is something that must be actively *done* and is impeded by the application of fixed rules (Johnson 1987, 74-75), the metaphor is perfect for Jeongjo’s redefinition of the sage-king as actively making policy rather than passively perfecting his moral virtue as his ministers do the actual work of governing; it counters the position of late Joseon Confucian scholar-

19. “北極者天樞也。爲天之中心。故名曰北極。亦屋極之義也。 . . . 皇極居九疇之中。如公田在九畝之中。爲四方四維之攸極。故曰建其有極也。斂時五福者” (“The five blessings are long life, wealth, good health, good relations with others, and natural death.”).

20. “以爲民極。正是皇建其極。易有太極。兩儀四象。六十四卦三百八十四爻。皆於是乎分出。如皇極斂福。用數錫萬民也” (“The four forms are the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars.”).

officials.²¹ The application of bodily balance to politics also neatly parallels the “effortless action” (*muwi* 無爲; Ch. *wuwei*) of the sage. Just as the feeling of balance, once thoroughly learned, is effortless (though attaining one’s balance in a given situation may not), the harmony of the realm is effortless once it is centered on the king. Further, as bodily balance is a matter of finding the center and orienting everything properly around it, a balanced court would find everything properly oriented around the king. Jeongjo writes:

[The Late King] used his years and months to rule them [his officials] and gave them blessings at the appropriate time. He extracted the court officials from the midst of their fighting and quarrelling and fixed them in their places.²²

Thus, the properly ordered court centers on the king, and with this, all is in harmony, with officials knowing their places and not participating in fractious conflict.

In his *The Body in the Mind*, Johnson (1987, 76-80) discusses Rudolf Arnheim’s study of visual perception. Using the figure of a solid black circle that is slightly off-center within a large white square, Arnheim argues that the center of the square, though not actually present (there is no mark in the figure denoting its location), nevertheless exerts a *pull* on the circle; people feel tension in the figure because the circle is not in the center of the square. Jeongjo’s imperial pivot takes advantage of this tension to portray orientation around the throne as natural and opponents of his position—those who would argue that shifting the focus to the king is improper—as unnatural.

“[T]he notion of *weight* is intimately related to the structure of the balance metaphor,” contends Johnson (1987, 89). The imperial pivot also works on this level, in this case, relying on the enormous weight of previous monarchs’ precedent on the Confucian ruler. To avoid the

21. For a discussion of Jeongjo’s redefinition of the sage-king’s role, see Park (2001, esp. sec. 1, ch. 2).

22 “日月以臨之. 霜露以時施之. 拔廷臣於戈戟之中. 而奠之衽席.”

appearance of innovation and to draw on the virtue of filiality, Jeongjo consistently argued that his policies were merely an extension of Yeongjo's, though in fact he was rather more successful than his grandfather in controlling factionalism (Haboush 1998, 233). Still, the king was not unwilling to point out weaknesses in his predecessor's Policy of Impartiality:

The Policy of Impartiality was the fundamental intention that weighed heavily on the Late King's heart. How could it resemble a makeshift policy to imitate the ways of old? Yet at that particular time, the officials who served and aided the Late King were truly unable to comprehend his sagely intention. So the Policy of Impartiality was no more than a jury-rig for dealing with affairs, a plan for mediating deliberations over this or that recommendation. Because of this, not long after it was enacted, it gradually moved onto the wrong track and gave rise to corrupt practices, enough that it could be used by royal relatives and powerful, treacherous ministers to bring about disorder. Alas! That the Policy of Impartiality would drive out factions such that I [coming to the throne after Yeongjo] would not even know their names is unfortunately similar to the saying that "the Policy of Impartiality faction is superior to the old factions." If the Late King himself had not displayed his sagely intention firmly for such a long time, how could the flow of vices [caused by these misunderstandings of the policy] have been limited?²³

The Imperial Pivot as a Double-Scope Blend

If Jeongjo used the imperial pivot in a new way, how did he accomplish this act of creativity? Double-scope blending sheds some light on this. "A simple source to target domain mapping," the "single-scope

23. "大抵蕩平一事，先大王苦心本意，何嘗髣髴於曩時規模？而特以當時承佐之臣，實不能仰體聖意，惟以彌縫爲事，甚至於一通一望，參互彼此，以爲調停之計。以故行之未久，浸浸然轉而生弊，祇足爲戚里權奸濁亂鉗制之資。噫！蕩平即祛偏黨，無物我之名，而世傳'蕩平之黨，甚於舊黨'之說，不幸近之。倘非先大王聖志赫然，彌久彌堅，其流之害，豈容但已？" (*Jeongjo sillok*, 22nd day of the 9th lunar month, 1st year of King Jeongjo's reign [1776]).

blend” (Slingerland 2008, 177), would not have served the king’s purpose. A pivot, after all, is acted upon. It is not a purposeful agent that brings about a balanced, functioning system, as the king is the sage-king in Jeongjo’s conception. Direct source-to-target mapping would imply that the king should do nothing, sitting motionless in the center while those around him are in motion, a state of affairs closer to his officials’ conception of the sage-king than to the activist sage-king that Jeongjo argued he was. By blending the pivot domain with that of the political sphere and the king’s role in it, Jeongjo was able to construct a blend that drew on the deep-seated human desire to get into (or maintain) equilibrium in service of a strengthening of his position while avoiding the passivity of a central pivot and the partiality of political reality. The blend is summarized in figure 1.

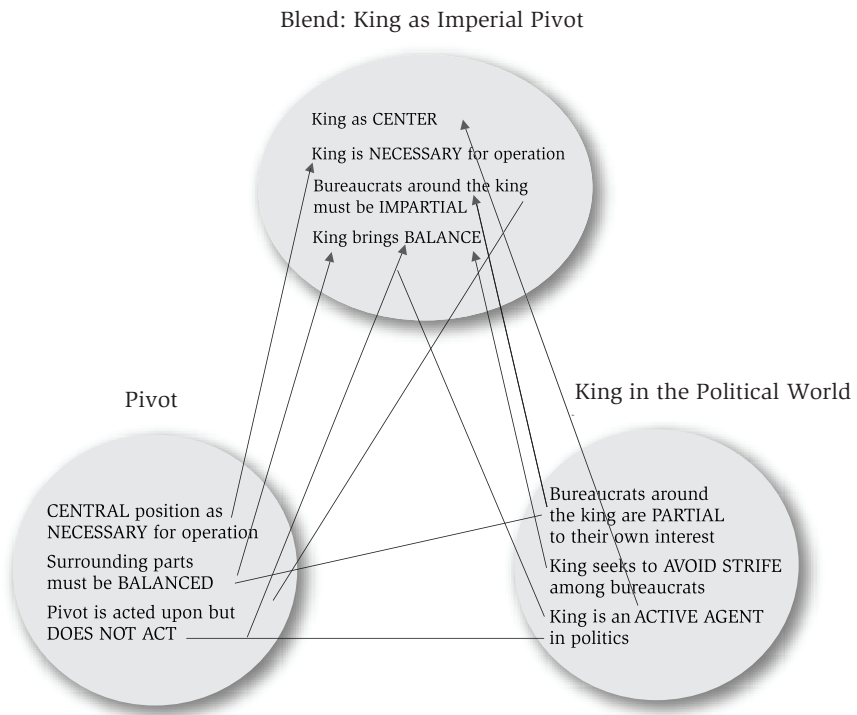


Figure 1. A Representation of the Imperial Pivot as a Blended Space

In discussing the blend of “digging a financial grave,” Edward Slingerland (2008, 179) puts Fauconnier and Turner’s characterization of the blend’s results in this following way: “. . . a compression of a situation with diffuse temporality, complex causality, and many potential agents into a single scene that is easy to visualize” The imperial pivot is clearly serving the same purpose for Jeongjo: the complexity of and diffuse influences on royal power are concentrated into the image of a single pivot around which everything is oriented in a balanced and orderly way. Further, just as “digging a financial grave” relies upon equating financial failure with the visceral aversion to death, the imperial pivot equates royal preeminence with visceral desire to gain or keep one’s own bodily balance. Readers may intuitively feel the *logic* of the king’s argument, even if they take issue with it in their conscious minds since it is a challenge to officials’ supremacy.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, in order that we do not fail to achieve [control of factionalism], my subjects and I together will protect the Great Harmony and in this way pursue the shining light of the Late King.²⁴

When King Jeongjo died in 1800 and his ten-year-old son ascended the throne, many of his policies were reversed and his supporters were purged from the government. While Yeongjo and Jeongjo together did represent an era of royal strength, they did not manage to institutionalize this strength so that mediocre kings could wield it as they had. Despite Jeongjo’s best efforts, the Korean king remained at best a first among equals for the remainder of the dynasty. The imperial pivot metaphor was persuasive only for a king skilled enough to use it to its full effect.

24. “惟勿墜圖功。同我世臣。保合大和。以追先王之耿光。”

This paper has explored King Jeongjo's imperial pivot as a blended metaphor for strengthening the throne in pursuit of suppressing factionalism through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory. It argues that in order for Jeongjo to use the power of the throne to eliminate divisive factions, he draws upon four primary metaphors—particularly that of balance—to provoke a visceral desire in his ministers. It argues further that the imperial pivot is a blended space that allows Jeongjo to invoke the visceral desire for equilibrium provided by the pivot metaphor while leaving behind its connotation of passivity.

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